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AUTHOR	Ediger, Marlow
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ABSTRACT

Students who live in rural areas will almost certainly leave those areas for occupations in larger city areas when they reach adulthood. Therefore, the child needs to receive the best education possible to prepare for an unknown future. This paper discusses some of the characteristics of rural schools, especially the plethora of children living in poverty without much taxable wealth to support public school education. The paper notes some of the problematic areas which poverty engenders: food and shelter deficiencies; lack of reading materials; lack of parental interest in school activities; richness in travel experiences not possible; and not being able to develop long-term goals in education. But it finds that whatever the situation, each rural child needs to learn to read well. It points out that holism in reading may be stressed with the following procedures of instruction: Reading Recovery; Big Book approaches; individualized reading; language experience approach; and linguistic procedures. The paper states that assessment needs to be ongoing to see how well students are doing in reading--teacher observation, based on valid principles of reading instruction can be a good procedure to use in the assessment process. It also recommends using a portfolio pertaining to reading, developed by the student. Contains 7 references. (NKA)

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Improving the Rural School Reading Curriculum.

by Marlow Ediger

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IMPROVING THE RURAL SCHOOL READING CURRICULUM

Pupils living in rural areas need a high quality reading curriculum. This is especially important since almost zero in number will spend their time in farming when reaching adulthood. Those not growing upon on farms but living in a rural area will later leave to where the jobs and occupations are in evidence in larger cities. Why will children leave farming and rural ways of living for urban areas when entering the world of work?

1. farm prices are exceedingly low. Farmers take tremendous risks when putting out crops, hoping to get a "bumper crop" with all the work and investment involved. These expectations can soon be greatly curtailed with drought, hail, excessive rain, insects, and very low farm prices, among other risks. In 1974, wheat sold for $5.20 per bushel whereas here it is $3 a bushel presently. Reasons given for low crop prices are a surplus in supply. This is difficult to prove when bringing in the law of supply and demand into the equation.
2. corporate farming has become rampant. Corporate hog farming may involve feeding and processing 100,000 hogs in one location. When the author in his high school days lived on his family farm, fifty butcher hogs were fed per year. Basically no individual farmer today raises hogs in the US. The same can be said for laying hens. A large corporate farm might have more than 100,000 cage laying hens in one location. This is to be compared with the author's family farm having 300 laying hens. There are still quite a few small farmers which have their own beef cattle operation, consisting of an estimated fifty animals. But cattle operations too are going in the direction of corporate farming with huge cattle feedlots which vary in size from 500 to several thousand in number (See Theobold and Alsmeyer, 1993).

Even if a child's parents are wealthy farmers with all farm implements and land paid for and being debt free, the chances would be rare if this offspring would be interested in the risks of farming. Those children living in a rural area with no parental farming operations involved will also need to prepare for a future occupation in a larger city area. What is the answer to these problems? Presently and as always, the child needs to receive the best education possible to prepare for the unknown future (Ediger, 1997, 330- 343).

Rural School Reading

There are a plethora of children living in poverty in rural

areas. These children might well be doing poorly in school achievement. However, rural areas vary much from small city to small city in terms of taxable wealth to support public school education. A few areas are somewhat prosperous and appealing. Travelers have traveled through scattered rural areas that have individual houses which look like and probably are mansions. These may be owned by medical doctors and other professionals living in rural areas. Basically, rural areas, however, tend to be lacking in income to provide children with the kind of education needed. Poverty appears to make for the following problematic areas:

1. inadequate supplies of food and other basic necessities of life.
2. shelter deficiencies such as living in older trailer houses, lacking proper heating in winter and air conditioning in summer.
3. a lack of reading materials in the home setting.
4. parents not modeling proper reading behavior to children.
5. a lack of parental interest in school activities and parent/teacher conferences.
6. discussions about what was emphasized in any reading selection not being in evidence. Interaction between child and parent can be greatly minimized making for a lack of oral communication skills.
7. richness in travel experiences not being possible due to money problems.
8. belonging feelings minimized for the child due to parental insecurity in many facets of life, income included.
9. a lack of esteem needs met due to being categorized into a low socio-economic group.
10. not being able to develop long term goals in education as well as not developing objectives for participation in society

Proper health might be in evidence for some children, and health insurance may be lacking. Whatever the situation, each rural school child needs to learn to read well in order to achieve optimally in school as well as in society, now and in the future. Each pupil has a favorite way of learning be it whole language or phonics approaches, or an in between point of operating. Selected learners are more analytical than others whereby they would be more phonics instruction orientated. Others are more global and perceive the wholeness of something such as inn whole language approaches in reading instruction. (See Searson and Dunn, 2001). Holism in reading may be stressed with the following procedures of instruction:

1. reading recovery.
2. Big Book approaches.
3. individualized reading.
4. language experience approach.
5. linguistic procedures.

Whole language instruction may hinder pupils in learning to associate consistent symbols with sounds as a means of becoming independent readers. There are, of course, graphemes (letters) which consistently relate directly to their related phonemes (sounds). The author when supervising university student teachers noticed how whole language teachers do bring in phonics when needed and the consistency is there between symbol and sound.

Those pupils who are more analytical may need an increased amount of phonics instruction in order to associate sounds (phoneme) with symbols (grapheme). There are selected cautions which need to be observed here in a strong program of phonics instruction:

1. the teacher can go overboard in phonics instruction when the graphemes and their respective phonemes do not harmonize in symbol/sound relationships.
2. pupils read too analytical and haltingly due to dividing words into appropriate/inappropriate segments.
3. children read words but do not comprehend their contents. Too much attention is focused upon the letters/graphemes within a word and not about the meaning of each sentence. Perhaps, they are so busy sounding out words that all concentration is given to phonics (Ediger and Rao 2003).

Adequate emphasis needs to be placed upon comprehension of ideas in reading to acquire ideas, when phonics instruction is <u>the</u> approach used in reading instruction. Phonics is a means to an end and that end being to comprehend facts, concepts, and generalizations being read. To often, phonics is taught for the sake of leaning sound/symbol relationships. Phonics, rather, needs to be taught so that a pupil can lean upon this approach in identifying unknown words.

Rural school pupils have a preference pertaining to learning by the self versus learning in a collaborative setting. Gardner (1993) stresses the importance of using the intelligence possessed by the individual pupil be it to learn by the self or with others to achieve in reading instruction. Perhaps, both are important in school and in society. Certainly, any person does

things by himself or herself as well as with others. If a pupil likes to work by the self in reading, this is fine since there are other academic areas whereby collaborative endeavors are possible. The same can be said of those who prefer collaborative endeavors in reading, there are possibilities to learn individually in other academic disciplines. Individualized reading emphasizes studying and learning by the self. Learning to read by the self includes individualized reading and Reading Recovery. Reading and studying in a group setting involves using the basal, language experience charts, and the Big Book approach.

Sequencing is an interesting phenomenon in reading instruction. Previous learnings provide background information for the new content/skills to be acquired when quality involved sequence is inherent. Should the pupil sequence his/her own achievement or should the teacher determine the order of learnings for pupils? Humanism, as a psychology of learning emphasizes pupils sequencing their very own learnings. Individualized reading stresses humanism in that each pupil chooses his/her own library books to read in the order desired. A goodly number of library books on different genera must be there so that the learner may truly make sequential choices. The learner then attempts to order learnings to attain as much as possible in reading, although this will be in an unconscious manner. In contrast, a logical sequence emphasizes the teacher selecting the objectives, learning opportunities, and appraisal procedures in teaching pupils such as in basal reader use. Thus, the teacher adjusts the curriculum to where each pupil can achieve optimally. Both pupil sequencing of his/her very own reading endeavors might be emphasized as well as the teacher logically ordering learnings for pupils .

Assessing Rural School Pupil Reading Achievement

Assessment needs to be ongoing to notice how well pupils are doing in reading. Teacher observation, based on valid principles of reading instruction can be a good procedure to use in the assessment process. The teacher may notice the following;

1. pupil interests in reading
2. pupil gains or achievement made in ongoing reading lessons and units of study.
3. pupil selections made of library books for leisure time reading.
4. pupil purposes and reasons provided for reading.
5. pupil achievement in word recognition skills.

6. pupil fluency in reading, across the curriculum.
7. pupil achievement in individual and collaborative reading endeavors.
8. pupil proficiency in critical and creative reading as well as in problem solving.
9. pupil attainment in reading subject matter meaningfully.
10. pupil progress in reading expository, creative, and narrative content (Ediger and Rao, 2003, Chapter Six).

Teachers need to observe carefully and continuously pupil achievement in the reading curriculum. Diagnosis of reading errors is very salient so that remedial efforts by the rural school pupil may be in the offing.

The psychology of humanism in reading instruction emphasizes self appraisal by pupils. Journal writing by the pupil may reveal personal interests, unique words encountered in reading, and reactions to content read. Also, a portfolio pertaining to reading may be developed by the pupil with the following involved items:

1. written products such as summaries, conclusions, drawings, book reports, and diagrams.
2. content mapping, webbing, a pictorial map, semantic features analysis, and venn diagrams.
3. poetry written such as couplets, triplets, quatrains, limericks, free verse, haiku, and tankas.
4. snapshots of construction items made which relate directly to the ongoing reading lesson/unit of study.
5. a video tape of the pupil involved in committee work covering one or more reading lessons.
6. self assessment data such as the pupil responding to items on a rating scale.
7. teacher developed test results to show pupil progress.
8. cassette recordings of read alouds to indicate pupil skill in word recognition and fluency in reading.
9. art products developed by pupils to show achievement in reading comprehension.
10. crossword puzzles and word search games to reveal progress in reading and vocabulary development (Ediger and Rao, 2000, Chapter Eight).

There are then a plethora of information sources which may be placed inside a portfolio to reveal pupil achievement. Carefully designed rubrics may be used to appraise portfolios. Two appraisers should evaluate each portfolio. Interrater reliability is important here in revealing consistent results.

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Truman State University
201 W. 22nd, Box 417
North Newton, KS. 67117

Printed Name/Position/Title: Marlow Ediger, Prof. Emer.

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